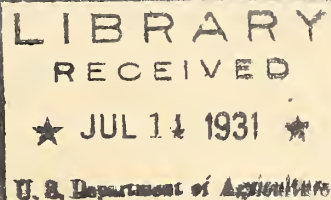


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A radio talk by W. W. Vincent, chief of the western district, Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered over KGO, San Francisco, and associated National Broadcasting Company stations, Thursday, July 16, 1931, at 12.45 P. M.

MR. LAMB: Good afternoon, folks. This must be label-reading day. Mr. W. W. Vincent, Chief of the Western District of the Department's Food and Drug Administration, joins us this afternoon equipped for an illustrated lecture.

MR. VINCENT: Hardly that, Mr. Lamb, I only have a couple of labels. One of them was received from a correspondent. I also have his letter and he's a little bit disgusted.

MR. LAMB: Not with us, I hope. All we've been doing is trying to get people to read labels. That's a fine looking label you have there. That bunch of green asparagus surely looks appetizing.

MR. VINCENT: But that's just the trouble - it only looked appetizing. Listen to this letter. It is addressed to us:

"My wife bought a can of Blank Brand Asparagus from a local grocer. The can had on the enclosed label which you will note has the picture of a whole asparagus and which she thought was whole asparagus. To her surprise when she opened it, it was a lot of butts. There was not a tip in the whole can. The stuff was not fit to eat and was dumped out. I think it a crime the way they can label stuff and dump any old thing in the can. True, we afterwards saw the little wording on the can 'Center Cut Asparagus' but who would stop to read the whole label when you ask a grocer for a can of asparagus and he gives you a can with a healthy looking bunch of asparagus pictured on it? These people should be prevented from using a label of this character and should be prosecuted for putting the stuff on the market."

What do you think of that, Mr. Lamb?

MR. LAMB: He is disgusted, isn't he. Maybe his wife is to blame.

She didn't bother to read those words in small type - "Center Cut Asparagus."

MR. VINCENT: Well, she's not entirely to blame this time. The Food and Drugs Act, I believe, will help her and other housewives in this matter. I think that can is misbranded. You see that word, "Specials", right above that beautiful bunch of asparagus? And do you see the words "Center Cut Asparagus" in much smaller type below it? Well, the Food

and Drugs Act has a section that covers such misbranding. It says that a food product is misbranded if its label bears any statement, design or device regarding the article or its ingredients or substances contained therein which is false or misleading in any particular. Well, certainly in this case the word, "Specials", together with that beautiful bunch of asparagus constitutes a misleading device. Yes, we are going to try to stop the use of this misleading label.

MR. LAMB: Well, I'm sure that everyone in this audience is in full agreement with that stand. I see right now that I'm going to read my asparagus labels a little more carefully than I have in the past. Mr. Vincent, there must be a lot of information that these folks should have about asparagus. Suppose you tell us about that today.

MR. VINCENT: All right, Mr. Lamb, but where shall I start? Asparagus, you know, was considered a delicacy by the Romans something over 2000 years ago. It has been used in medicine at various times. Its roots formerly were believed an aperient, while the fruit, as well as the asparagus itself, was believed to possess diuretic virtue. Did you ever see full grown asparagus?

MR. LAMB: Not that I recall. My experience is pretty well limited to the canned variety and the bunches of fresh stalks displayed in the grocery stores. I never saw any asparagus fruit either.

MR. VINCENT: Well, most people haven't, but it does have fruit. Asparagus is a rather interesting plant, a perennial. There are over 150 species. It is a native of the Old World. Its fruit is a small red berry somewhat comparable to pepper berries. Some species of the plant are very beautiful, with feathery branches. You have seen asparagus ferns. They are a cousin to our cultivated asparagus. Asparagus grows wild along the south coast of England, and on the plains of Russia. It's so prolific there that the cattle graze upon it in lieu of grass.

MR. LAMB: Is this wild species edible?

MR. VINCENT: It probably is. The cows eat it. But our cultivated variety is known as "asparagus officinalis" --cultivated since early times. And we eat a lot of it. The United States produces enormous quantities. California alone in 1930 canned 2,663,191 cases. Lots of discrimination possible in the purchase of this huge amount. Some canners present you with as many as 27 different styles or varieties of packs. While there is no uniform specification followed by all canners, the nomenclature applied to the product is pretty well standardized. Let's start our discussion with the methods of canning:

The small shoots are harvested when just breaking through the soil or shortly after having emerged. As received at the cannery, the asparagus has been cut in about seven-inch lengths -- which cuts were made under ground. At the cannery it is graded to size and cut to uniform lengths by machines. Women sort out unsightly or defective spears. After washing in cold water, the asparagus is immersed in boiling water. This blanches or whitens it. Next it is cut to proper lengths and packed in

steam retorts. To insure sterility of asparagus packed in California, the California State Department of Public Health made compulsory regulations providing the time and temperature of cooking to which each size can must be subjected. Inspectors check the cooks on each batch produced.

Now, you should know that the diameter of the asparagus stalks is of importance. The diameter governs the grading of the various sizes packed in cans. Since many asparagus labels bear the grade designations upon them, you should know that the term, "Giant", means asparagus of 1 inch diameter at the base. Most of that goes to the fresh market. The term "Colossal" means asparagus of 7/8 inch diameter; "Mammoth", 3/4 inch; "Large", 5/8 inch; "Medium", 1/2 inch; "Small", 3/8 inch and "Tiny" under 3/8 inch diameter. The man who selected these grade names must have been addicted to the use of superlatives. Ungraded asparagus contains all sizes, including flowered and misshapen spears. It is principally ungraded material that your so-called soup stock contains.

In addition to size, color is of importance. Cannerymen separate asparagus into lots light green in color, all white, or natural, that is, bearing a purplish tinge. This latter product goes chiefly to export trade, although you will see some labeled, "Natural", on the domestic market. Since some individuals, as well as some markets, express a preference for either the green or white grades, you will frequently see label declarations indicating the product is "white" or "green", or "all green".

You may observe the words "Peeled Asparagus" - That means the outer skin has been removed. It is considered a superior product and will cost you more money.

Asparagus comes to you in both square and round cans. The small square can is called a No. 1 Square, while the tall square can is called a No. 2 1/2 square. In the round cans you receive asparagus in what is called the "picnic", or small tin, contents about 10 ozs.; in the No. 1 tall, contents about 15 ozs.; in the No. 2 tall, contents about 1 lb. 4 ozs.; the 2 1/2 tall, contents 1 lb. 12 ozs. and in the large, or No. 10 can with total contents of about 6 lbs. 4 ozs. The various grades, that is, "Giant", "Colossal", "Mammoth", etc., are packed in the different sizes of tins. So careful label reading, if you know your grades and their diameters, will enable you to know how many stalks you are receiving. My "Read-the-Label" information will give you figures.

Since asparagus is served in various ways -- the long stalks, hot; the shorter stalks in salads and for garnishings; the shorter tips as a salad vegetable, as in combination salads -- it seems to me that you housewives, expecting six guests for dinner, need to know the grades if you are going to get exactly what you want. Of course, the cannerymen, if they chose to do so, could tell you on the can labels, in addition to giving you grade names, the approximate number of spears within the can. Since they don't, I'm putting it in my "Read-The-Label" information. Also, I am giving you a picture of the actual grades, and their sizes.

Now, you will encounter in all sizes of cans a product labeled "Salad Points", that is, the asparagus tips, ranging in length from 1 to 2 1/2 inches. Their diameter range usually varies between that of the

mammoth and small sizes. The very large and the very small are excluded. Ordinarily, the salad points command a lower price than does the product labeled "Asparagus Tips", which is cut to the uniform length of 3-1/8 inches, or 3-5/8 inches, depending on size of can used. Should you encounter a label reading "Asparagus Soup Tips", or "Asparagus Tips", the can must contain nothing but the tip portions, whereas a label reading "Asparagus Center Cuts" will contain no tip pieces. A product labeled merely "Cut Asparagus", or "Asparagus Soup Cuts", will contain both tips and center cut or butt pieces. The ratio between center and butt pieces to tips is about 2 to 1 in a product labeled "Cut Asparagus" or "Soup Cuts".

That's all today.